DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 399 HE 017 219

AUTHOR Yee, Sandra G.
TITLE The Role of the Academic Library in a University Honors Program.
PUB DATE 23 Mar 84
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Michigan Academy of Arts, Science, and Letters (Big Rapids, MI, March 23, 1984).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academically Gifted; College Faculty; College Libraries; College Students; Higher Education; *Honors Curriculum; *Information Seeking; *Librarians; *Library Skills; Problem Solving; *Research Skills

ABSTRACT

The ways in which the university library can serve the honors student through the cooperation of professional librarians and faculty are discussed. A close alliance with the university librarian can help promote successful structure and student experiences with research. Attention should be focused on the development of problem-solving skills that can cross disciplines. Honors courses should incorporate research assignments that can be used or adapted to a library learning model, an approach that necessitates critical thinking and problem-solving. Librarians might participate with honors basic studies faculty to design activities or assignments that introduce students to information sources for research projects. Honors students should be allowed to define research topics, either individually or in small groups. By developing a list of questions to be answered, students can define the scope of the problem. Learning to identify library resources provides students a basis on which to build transferability of information seeking skills. By incorporating a library research experience in honors programming, gifted students are provided with additional motivation to improve and apply their skills in finding and using information, and to become independent learners and researchers. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED243399

The Role of the Academic Library in a University Honors Program

Paper presented by
Sandra G. Yee
at Michigan Academy of Arts, Science and Letters
Library Science Section
Ferris State College
Big Rapids, Michigan
March 23, 1984

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sandra G. Yee

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

NE 017 219

The Role of the Academic Library in a University Honors Program

Honors programs and courses at the college and university level are designed and maintained with significant goals in mind. Among these goals are: "1) to identify and motivate students whose ability and motivation are so high that their academic needs would not be adequately met by existing programs and 2) to provide academic opportunities of such caliber that the students thus identified are challenged to perform at the highest level of excellence of which they are capable and through which they may become independent learners."[1] In order to provide academic opportunities of this nature, universities must make use of every available resource on campus including highly qualified faculty in every department. In addition, support services and professionals may be called upon to provide experiences which additionally challenge these students and add another dimension to their academic programs. It is in this capacity that the university library can serve the honors students - through professional librarians working closely with faculty.

Honors program directors typically seek "library privileges" for honors students which may include such amenities as extended loan periods, designated study carrels, or free online database searches. These privileges certainly play a part in attracting honors students to the honors program, and in providing needed

materials for extended study, but are not the only way in which the library and librarians can provide support for the honors students.

If these students are to be challenged and provided opportunities to excel in academic areas, it follows that early in their honors programs they should be provided the opportunity to develop and refine skill in critical thinking and skill in library research.

Honors faculty will expect their students to write research papers, complete reports, conduct survey research, to take an active role in classes as discussion leaders, and work within small groups to encourage dialogue and meaningful discussion. These faculty may find that in order to successfully structure student experiences with research, a close alliance with the university librarians is beneficial for all involved. It is, however, essential that librarians not be called upon to simply explain what library resources are available, and where they're located. This type of lecture - or one hour stand - is often boring and of little use to students in regular academic programs, and could certainly be "deadly" for the honors students. That is why we must begin to focus less on tool usage, and more on the development of problem-solving skills which can cross discipline boundaries. In RQ Summer, 1983, Mona McCormick says, "If library education focuses only on how to locate information and on the particulars of a certain index or "tool", it will soon bore the student

who does not experience the challenge and creativity of using the information critically."[2] She continues, "Somehow in our preoccupation with library procedures, we have ignored the reasons for searching - to learn, to make informed decisions, to evaluate applications of knowledge, to find truth."[3]

Honors classes and students seem to be particularly well suited as targets for teaching library research as a potential problem-solving activity. Students are "encouraged to think, and to do research across traditional disciplinary boundaries."[4] Honors classes may make use of small group work and discussion, and these courses may already incorporate research assignments which can be used or adapted to a library learning model that will necessitate critical thinking and problem-solving.

Cerise Oberman and Rebecca A. Linton suggest using or adapting for library use instruction an educational model developed by Charles Wales and Robert Stager called Guided Design. Wales delineates five principles which represent effective teaching and provide necessary interaction between student and teacher. These principles are: "1) Guide - provide specific objective, close supervision and appropriate evaluation. 2) Practice - students should be involved in the process of answering single-answer and open-ended problems. 3) Evaluate - students should have direct interaction at every opportunity, perferably written, through the use of feedback sheets. 4) Maturate - Reinforcement through feedback produces motivation and maturation. Maturation is also encouraged when the student realizes

that learned concepts and principles have direct application in a larger context. 5) Individualize - Through a variety of learning materials and through group work with peer tutors, individualization of learning allows students to learn at their own pace."[5] Wales also devised a system of decision-making steps which incorporate his principles of teaching. Oberman successfully applies these steps, and therefore the principles of teaching, to library research, thus providing a model upon which we can base integrated library instruction with honors courses of all levels in all disciplines.

Oberman says, "Library research is a problem-solving task requiring knowledge of tools and bibliographic structure as well as an ability to construct a strategy for locating information."[6] Her three steps of problem-solving applied to library research, all of which can easily be adapted to honors courses research assignments, are:

1) Needs analysis: This clarifies the problem. It identifies the shape and scope of the problem. It involves three general categories: scope, perspective and discipline.
2) Linkage: Understanding the relationship that one piece of research has to another - to provide links from one source to another until all necessary sources are located.
3) Evaluation: Formulating criteria against which judgements can be made. These should consist of such elements as: accuracy, currency, depth of information, level of information, as well as perspective.[7]

In a recent issue of the AAHE Bulletin Stonewater and Stonewater describe what they have found to be necessary components of any situation which attempts to teach problem-solving skills. The stimulation of cognitive development is one part of the necessary components and the authors suggest that there are two categories of instructional strategies which may facilitate this. Those are: 1) instruction that challenges the students' cognitive structures or creates disequilibrium; and 2) instruction which provides support so that the student will engage in the opportunity created by the disequilibrium.[8] They say, "...instruction that in some way upsets or challenges the students' view of reality and subsequently forces the student to reorganize thought structures is critical."[9] Activities with library research can be structured so that the students' view of reality (using the library to find answers) can be challenged in such a way that they no longer think of the library as a place to find answers, but as a place in which to find support for answers the students' themselves determine.

Practice in combining library instruction and problem-solving activities can come as early as freshmen level basic studies honors courses which require the students to research a topic, and/or attempt to provide students practice in critical thinking. In order to be assured that academic honors faculty members make use of the assistance which can be provided by the librarian in this area, it is essential that the library be viewed as an integral part of the academic honors program,

and that the librarians are actively involved, are in close touch with honors faculty members, and to some extent included in the formation of honors course proposals. Active involvement of this type can be facilitated by the librarians' membership on the honors advisory council which helps to legitemize an active role in the academic program. Faculty members who are regular bibliographic instruction proponents are prime candidates for early library involvement. As with any instruction program, an active public relations campaign will facilitate librarian involvement with these courses, especially through contacts with new honors faculty. Librarians' involvement in many types of activities in the library for honors students will also be benficial to promoting the close alliance which involves library research in the problem-solving, critical thinking activities.

Students might tour the library facilities during their honors orientation, and be introduced to special library privileges at that time. Librarians might participate with honors basic studies faculty to design activities or assignments which introduce students to information sources that would be needed for research assignments at this stage and later. Some attention should be paid to developing these students' skills in analyzing problems by allowing them to carefully define their research topics, either individually or in small groups, by preparing a list of questions which will need to be answered for each of their topics. This activity will help create disequilibrium. Upon arriving at a list of

questions to be answered, students should be guided to define the scope of the problem, emphasizing any limitations which might necessarily change the emphasis of the research. This involves the students in the activity and forces them to re-organize thought structures. Up to this point, the honors faculty member would be closely working with the individuals or groups to provide support and feedback regarding the questions to be answered and the scope of the problem. At this time, a librarian may be invited to the class to work with the faculty member to guide the students in the next step - defining the types of information which will be needed to answer the defined questions and to find out what possible types of sources would provide that information. At this point, students are still not investigating specific reference sources; they are only determining the types of sources which may be needed to find specific kinds of information which they have defined in the earlier steps. The librarian could be asked to work with the individuals or groups to identify specific types of library resources which might be appropriate for the questions as defined. Rather than discussing specific reference tools, the types of tools to be used in seeking information provides students a basis upon which to build transferability of information seeking. The importance of being able to transfer library related instruction from one discipline to another is clearly apparent. Oberman succinctly speaks to the importance of guided information seeking when she says, "Because the decision-

making framework of Guided Design teaches library research as an open-ended, problem-solving task, students learn skills they can recognize as being transferable from one library research problem to another."[10]

The critical evaluation of sources is a vital step in this research process. Mona McCormick maintains, "All too often, educators and librarians have set an exaggerated value on teaching and collecting facts rather than on valuing explanations, arguments, and critical attitudes toward facts."[11] In addition, Patricia Knapp writes in Independent Study and the Academic Library, "Students have a basic misconception of the function of the information in inquiry - they look for and expect to find the answer to the question rather than the evidence to be examined."[12] Students must be guided to question the sources which they ultimately locate, to view these sources in the light of criticisms of other scholars, to question the currency, depth and perspective of the work, to question whether facts support conclusions, and to recognize bias, emotional appeals, or propaganda. A specific tool, The Book Review Digest, might be introduced at the time of critical evaluation to provide a source from which varied criticisms of a scholarly or popular work might be located.

The librarian may want to provide an annotated bibliography of specific reference tools that exemplify the types of sources students have identified as necessary. Some brief instruction in the use of these tools may be warranted, but honors students

should be encouraged to explore the reference sources and to determine how to use them on their own. Again, they will discover transferable skills in the use of these sources.

In an effort to emphasize the critical evaluation of sources which the reference tools help locate, students might be required to compile an annotated critical bibliography for their research topic by using a variety of reviews and by questioning on their own the worthiness of each source. This assignment might be a worthwhile substitute for the term paper in a low level honors course, forcing students to follow the guided design steps of analyzing problems, determining types of sources and evaluating these sources, without writing a lengthy paper.

Other alternatives to the term paper which provide students practice in critical thinking are being used at the State University of New York at Oswego. Students are required to compare the credentials of a popular author with those of a scholarly one, investigating their backgrounds and drawing conclusions; or they may choose a topic (again analyzing it) and find a landmark study or book about it, emphasizing the need to determine, through critical evaluation, the "landmark."

Honors faculty who encourage the use of small group work or discussion can use this technique at any level to encourage students to approach research using a problem-solving model. Groups at the freshmen level might be provided with much feedback and guidance from both the professor and the librarian. After becoming acquainted with the technique, students in

higher level courses will be able to proceed with less feedback and guidance, but will be provided opportunities to explore more advanced types of reference sources, and to produce a more complete final product. At every level, students could be required to keep a log or journal of the process which was used to locate sources and to review the search process at the completion of the research to determine what improvements could have been made. Librarians may again be asked to assist in this analysis in order to provide additional guidance to the students in recognizing various or optional types of library resources that are available. This process provides the student with the opportunity to mature, and will hopefully encourage or motivate the student to seek additional sources in another context.

The type of guidance thus far described can be given in a limited fashion in varying degrees depending upon the length of time devoted to the project during the semester. In a narrow sense, one class period can be devoted to the use of a very basic model of library research as a problem-solving activity. Students could still be required to briefly analyze a problem. All students might be required to analyze the same problem. This analysis could include: formulating questions to be answered; determining the type of information that would answer these questions; and evaluating the probable solutions, including the apparent limitations of these answers. Students

might then explore with a librarian the sources which might provide answers to the questions, and as a culminating activity outside of class, compile a bibliography of these sources discussing the appropriate library tools.

In other instances, the activity may involve the entire semester. Honors programs often make use of the independent study course or the small group seminar in order to provide challenging activities for students in areas in which no formal honors courses are available. A team-taught independent study course or seminar in an academic discipline which focuses on a research problem is the ideal situation in which to reinforce both problem-solving and critical thinking as well as practice in library research.

Beth J. Shapiro and Richard Hill report on their experience at Michigan State University when they team-taught a graduate sociology seminar that emphasized library research and that was organized around four major topics: 1) problem definition, 2) strategy of the literature search, 3) techniques for an effective search process and 4) critical evaluation of the results. Students were provided a bibligraphy of 85 sources which were to be discussed throughout the semester. However, the authors maintain that, "...the principal goal was to provide budding social science researchers with an opportunity to explore intensively the intricacies of the search process itself."[13] Throughout the semester an effort was made to encourage class discussion about problems individual students might be experiencing, sharing mutual learning and encouraging students to model

themselves upon one another. This turned out to be an aspect of the seminar which students found to be exceptionally helpful and rewarding. "Many (students) commented that for the first time... a collective forum was provided for students to discuss their research and problems with their peers."[14] Many of Wales' and Stagers' principles of teaching were employed in this course, and were used to encourage the view that library research can be approached as a problem-solving exercise.

Although this seminar was conducted as a graduate level class, it can be easily adapted to the honors upper level seminar classes, providing honors students, most of whom will go on to graduate school, with a solid background in library use that is transferable to many subject areas, because the emphasis is on problem-solving and evaluation of materials rather than on memorization of specific reference tools.

The emphasis on honors courses and students here does not mean to suggest that students in other classes should not be provided opportunities to develop problem-solving research skills. They can and should be encouraged at every opportunity to view research in this way. They should be provided a background in critical evaluation, and should be introduced to such sources as the Book Review Digest. Honors courses are suggested as ideal courses in which to institute these models of instruction in library research because they typically already use a format which is easily adapted to the design, and because the honors students are seeking the type of challange

this research model can provide. In addition, honors faculty will expect students to provide new and well thought out answers to problems rather than simple "play-backs." Problem-solving skills will be needed throughout their coursework, and these students will be engaged in activities which promote the transferability of research skills.

By incorporating a solid library research experience in honors programming, these gifted students are provided with additional motivation to improve and apply their skills in finding and using information, and to become independent learners and researchers.

Footnotes

[1] C. Grey Austin, "Honors Learning in the Seventies." Educational Record 56, No. 3 (October, 1975): 10.

[2] Mona McCormick, "Critical Thinking and Library Instruction." RQ 22, No. 4 (Summer, 1983): 339.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Eastern Michigan University Honors Advisory Council, Faculty and Staff Honors' Policy Manual, p. 6.

[5] Cerise Oberman and Rebecca A. Linton, "Guided Design: Teaching Library Research as Probelm-Solving" in Theories of Bibliographic Education, eds. Cerise Oberman and Katrina Strauch. (New York: R. R. Bowker Co.), pp. 114.

[6] Ibid. p. 111.

[7] Ibid. p. 113.

[8] Jerry K. Stonewater and Barbar B. Stonewater, "Teaching Problem-Solving: Implications from Cognitive Development Research," AAHE Bulletin 36 (Feb., 1984): 7.

[9] Ibid. p. 8.

[10] Cerise Oberman, "Guided Design," p. 125.

[11] Mona McCormick, "Critical Thinking," p. 340.

[12] Patricia B. Knapp, "Independent Study and the Academic Library," in Approach to Independent Study, comps. Winslow R. Hatch and Alice L. Richards. New Dimensions in Higher Ed., No. 13., 1965.

[13] Beth J. Shapiro and Richard Child Hill, "Teaching Sociology Students Bibliographic Methods for Documents Research," Journal of Academic Librarianship 5 (May, 1979): 76.

[14] Ibid. p. 78.

Bibliography

Austin, C. Grey. "Honors Learning in the Seventies." Educational Record 56 No. 3 October 1975, pp 160-161.

Eastern Michigan University. Faculty and Staff Honors' Policy Manual. 1983.

Furedy, John J. and Furedy, Christine. "Course Design for Critical Thinking." Improving College and University Teaching 27 No. 3, Summer 1979, pp 99-101.

Hatch, Winslow R. and Richards, Alice L. Approach to Independent Study. New Dimensions in Higher Education, No. 13.

Kobleski, Pamela and Reich, Mary. "Conceptual Frameworks for Bibliographic Instruction." Journal of Academic Librarianship 7 No. 2 May 1981, pp 73-77.

McCormick, Mona. "Critical Thinking and Library Instruction." RQ 22 No. 4 Summer 1983, pp 339-341.

Oberman, Cerise and Strauch, Katrina. Theories of Bibliographic Education; Designs for Teaching. New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1982.

Shapiro, Beth J. and Hill, Richard Child. "Teaching Sociology Students Bibliographic Methods for Documents Research." Journal of Academic Librarianship 5 No. 2 May, 1979, pp 75-78.

Stonewater, Jerry K. and Stonewater, Barbara B. "Teaching Problem-Solving: Implications from Cognitive Development Research." AAHE Bulletin 36 Feb., 1984, pp 7-10.